



Christian Conference of Asia

cca news



To Heal and Reconcile

Volume 44 • Number 4 • December 2009

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To heal and reconcile



*For He himself (Jesus Christ) is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.
(Ephesians 2:14)*

More walls still to fall!

Last 9 November 2009, tens of thousands of people, including many world leaders, gathered in Berlin, Germany for prayers and songs to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall brought hope and opportunity to people everywhere, and provided the 1980s with a truly jubilant finale.

The road to the end of the Cold War was certainly not easy. Its lesson remains relevant today. In the 1980s, the world was at a historic crossroad. The East-West arms race had created an explosive situation. Nuclear deterrents could have failed at any time. We were heading for disaster, while stifling creativity and development.

There is not just one wall, however. Many walls still remain, e.g. the 38th Parallel Line between the Democratic People of the Republic Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK); the concrete wall dividing Palestine and Israel; and many others. People from both sides of the wall are crying to break down the barriers. They cry not only for national reunification, but more urgently, for the reunification of families and loved ones.

Climate change and global warming are the new walls that divide us from our future. And current global leaders are underestimating the urgency and a potentially catastrophic scale of the emergency. People used to joke that we will struggle for peace until there is nothing left on earth. The threat of climate change makes this prophecy more literal than ever.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany's first leader who grew up in East Germany, said in a speech, "The night of November 9, 1989 was fulfillment of a dream and many played a role." Just as the German people declared their will for unity, reconciliation and healing, the world's communities today are demanding that action be taken to tackle conflict and division among us, and to redress the deep injustices that surround it.

We all want closer and just human relationships. We want to love and be loved. We want friends who care for us, colleagues who respect us and families that love us. How do we break down walls? Who will break down walls?

St. Paul responded to this question by affirming that "For he himself is our peace who has made both one, has broken down the middle wall of separation" (Ephesians 2:14). God cares and "gave the only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God cares about our human relationships.

God wishes to restore to perfection not only relationships between humanity and God, but also the relationships among creation. That is why God gave us Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this Christmas. Jesus Christ came to break down dividing walls and to tear down fences. He came to invite us to share the task of reconciliation and healing, to follow his path - the path of justice-making.

*Only when justice reigns
will there be love, joy,
peace, and forgiveness
in our relationships and daily life.*

*Only when justice reigns
will the walls and fences
be no more.*

Prawate Khid-arn

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Cover photo:

Naw Paw Kue (meaning 'cold flower' in Karen) was three days old when her mother carried her while fleeing from a village in Karen State, Burma as she crossed into Thailand in May 2009.

Photo: Janejinda Pawadee/MEPP

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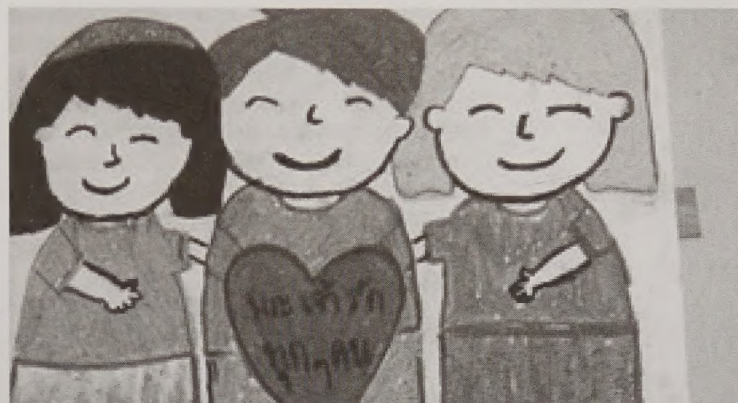
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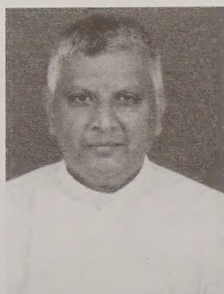
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Jesus: Prophet, Reconciler and Healer



During Christmas we focus on the message of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among human beings (John 1: 14), in a particular historical, socio-political and cultural context. It is the Word which became flesh which brought the creation into being. In the 1st chapter of the book of Genesis it says at several points. "And God said..." and it happened. Therefore, it is clear that the Word is spoken by God and the creation which included human beings come to existence and God sees it as "...good." (Genesis 1:31)

When we come to the era of prophets it is this Word which encounters the prophets, and it is this Word which enables and empowers the insignificant men and women to act as God's prophets to denounce structures of oppression, behavior and acts of evil of human beings and to announce God's era of Shalom.

The prophet Isaiah draws the attention of the people to the era of Shalom when he says, "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isa. 43: 18-18; also see Isa.42: 6f; Amos. 5: 14; Micah. 4: 3-4). This shows how prophesy is not limited to judgment and condemnation alone. Along with the pronouncement of God's judgment the prophets also provided a vision for a new future. Therefore, one can say that Prophets were people who walked and talked with God, and it is because of that close encounter with God that they were able to imagine that a better world is possible and that imagination is what made them say to a people who had lost hope that "...I am doing a new thing."

Hence, we expect during the Assembly and after, for the churches to capture this divine imagination and speak to a dying world a message of repentance which embodies within it a message of hope, freedom and deliverance. The prophetic word was clear that without repentance and a commitment to change (metanoia), a better world is not possible. Today, the world is faced with the threat of climate change which can lead to destruction

and hardship. In many of the discussions around climate change we notice that those who have power and those who misuse power do not or are reluctant to let go of power. At the same time we also know that without change of priorities, lifestyles, values and attitudes by those nations and individuals responsible for polluting God's creation, we will not see the healing and renewal of God's creation.

The Word Become Flesh

The Word which brought to being the creation and the Word which made ordinary people become prophets of imagination, breaks into human history and becomes flesh and blood (human). This in a nutshell is the story of Christmas. This Word which became flesh in Jesus the Christ also functioned as a prophet to denounce corruption of institutionalized religion of his day, corrupt practices of religion, abuse of religious authority, slavery to mammon, merging of corrupt political and religious powers to stay in power. On the other hand, Jesus the Christ also announced to the people around him that God's new reign has come with him. In other words, he was saying the same thing that prophet Isaiah said, "Behold I am doing a new thing". In fact that is exactly what Jesus did and wanted his followers to carry out as his disciples. We hope that during the Assembly the delegates will wrestle with some of these issues and be challenged by each other.

Jesus the Christ, by doing this new thing, broke down barriers between ethnic rivalry, gender rivalry, caste and class rivalry, lay and ordained rivalry. He also broke down the culture of violence and revenge and advocated a culture of love, compassion and forgiveness. This is the reason Jesus told one of his followers, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he/she cannot see the kingdom of God." (John. 3: 3).

During the Assembly, when we focus on the word "Reconcile" we expect all the above and more issues to be lifted up by delegates and challenge the churches to re-reflect on its own mission within the

context of Asia. In a sense, it is one of the unique ways to witness to and imitate Jesus the Christ amidst people of diverse faiths and no faiths

"Heal" is the other word in the Assembly theme. This is also another word which needs to be expounded to redeem it from being abused and misused by many people in the name of Jesus the Christ. It is important to understand that healing is more than cure. Healing embraces the whole of the human being created in God's image. When Jesus spelt out his mission in the Nazareth Manifesto, he said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4: 18-19). This manifesto embodies the liberating, reconciling, curing and healing ministry of Jesus the Christ. Therefore, churches must focus on these aspects as a central part of its ministry not only during Christmas, but throughout the whole year. In fact, the Church is set apart by God to be an embodiment of this ministry and the Church becomes an embodiment by imitating the ministries of prophecy, reconciliation and healing.

In a similar way the seven "I am" sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John leads us to encounter the Jesus who cared for people and who understood the pain and suffering of the people. Through these sayings one is driven to encounter Jesus the prophet, reconciler and healer.

I am the bread of life (Jn. 6:35)

I am the light of the world (Jn. 8:1)

I am the door (Jn. 10:8)

I am the good shepherd (Jn. 10: 14)

I am the resurrection and the life
(Jn. 11: 25)

I am the way, and the truth and the life
(Jn. 14: 6)

I am the true vine (Jn. 15:1)

The majority of people who live in this world are in search of life in the midst of death, light in the midst of darkness. These people also struggle to open doors because they feel excluded, they seek guidance and care because they are lost, and they also seek re-creation because they feel desecrated, and are in search

for the truth because they are victims of falsehood and deception. These are aspects of God's healing and caring ministry and people in our congregations, communities and nations are seeking all these aspects to be healed in body, mind and spirit.

God sent God's son, whom we remember during Christmas, to mend, reconcile and heal God's creation. The Church is called to be messengers of the prophesying, reconciling and healing ministry which is the ministry of Jesus the Christ. To engage in this ministry is to imitate Jesus the Christ. To imitate Jesus the Christ is to witness to the Word become flesh and dwelt among us as one of us!

Rienzie Perera



Burmese folks seeking refuge in Thailand. What is the meaning of healing and reconciliation for them?

What does Love look like?



Translated in English, the heart in the picture above says 'God loves everyone'. (Photo: CCT Aids Ministry)

I was reading the section on Outer Competence of Dr. Sue Parry's book, "Beacons of Hope: HIV Competent Churches - A Framework for Action," when this line from a verse, written by St. Augustine in 354 AD caught my imagination: "What does love look like?" I asked myself the very same question as I work on HIV and AIDS.

What does love look like?
It has hands to help others
It has feet to hasten to
the poor and needy
It has eyes to see misery and want
It has ears to hear the sighs and
sorrow of others
That's what love looks like.

I am compelled to write on this theme of love because we Christians use this word so often but find it very difficult to practice, most especially to those who are difficult to love. The Christian Conference of Asia

(CCA) seeks to act from deep spirituality and theology grounded in the value of justice. The foremost scriptural basis for the CCA HIV and AIDS policy is "Loving others as oneself" (John 13:34-35). But where do we find this kind of love in our world today?

Ms. Janejinda Pawadee, Coordinator of the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP), and I were in Yangon, Myanmar on November 16-20, 2009. The Myanmar Council of Churches' HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Program arranged a full schedule of visits and I found love in many places in Yangon. But there was one church that demonstrated the answer to St. Augustine's question, "What does love look like?" I saw this kind of love in Rev. Dr. Arthur Ko Lay, senior pastor of Judson Church, one of the 4,626 churches of the Myanmar Baptist Churches located in Yangon, Myanmar.

Rev. Dr. Ko Lay is one of the leading ecumenical leaders in Asia. His church celebrated World AIDS Day when it was not yet popular for churches to get involved. His church welcomed people living with HIV and AIDS, organized awareness building meetings on HIV and AIDS for members of his congregation and supported a religious leader with HIV to continue in the ministry. This World AIDS Day, an event celebrated on December 1st and around this period, members of his congregation will visit people living with HIV who are in the communities and in the hospitals. They will talk about the theme, "Universal Access and Human Rights".

Access to anti-retroviral drugs and medicines for opportunistic infections and the continuum of care continue to be a problem in Myanmar as in many countries. Stigma and discrimination continue to drive away people living with HIV and AIDS to access care and support. Families often hide the fact that their own members have HIV and AIDS because of stigma and discrimination. This is not so with Rev. Dr. Arthur Ko Lay, whose son

himself died of HIV related illness. He accepted his son and his entire family gave him unconditional love and support. He disclosed the situation to members of his congregation and the community and used their family experience to give a message on what it means to experience Christ and live out faith in the midst of a very vulnerable and broken world. Stigma and discrimination should have no place in church communities and in all communities.

To make his congregation appreciate this form of ministry, he brought other people living with HIV in church fellowship and study meetings without revealing their status in the beginning. In the end, when he revealed that some people in the meeting were positive, members of his congregation embraced them and prayed for them. For him, even if he would be infected with HIV, he would continue to preach the message of love as a witness to others of what this love means. Even if he is thrown out in the streets, he would continue to preach the gospel of love and care. The important value for him is fidelity to God's mission and the building of God's reign here on earth. Jesus came in the midst of our broken world and dwelt among us - commanding us to love and to live life in all its fullness.

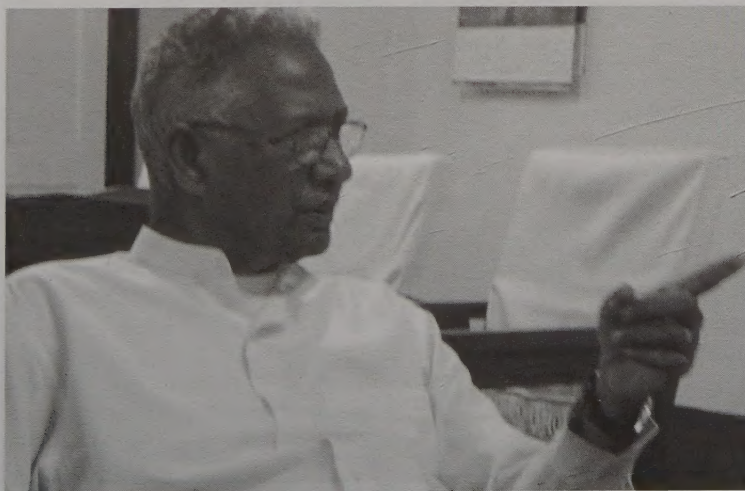
We learned that his church will be a venue for a meeting of the Myanmar Positive Group (MPG) during the weekend. He introduced us to the organizer of the meeting, Mrs. Naw She Wah, Project Officer of MPG and one of those people living with HIV who has attended his

meetings and received loving embrace from his church members.

Mrs. Nah She Wah is a widow and is living with HIV. Her husband died of HIV and when this happened she lost all her material possessions. But she is happy that her two children are with her. Both are healthy, HIV-negative and are in school. She forgave her husband and moved on. A baptized member of the Myanmar Baptist Convention, she decided to embrace her faith even more and this led her to Rev. Arthur Ko Lay who encouraged her to engage in meaningful work and continue witnessing her faith to others. She found employment in the Population Services International's Targeted Outreach Program (TOP) in Yangon, an organization that provides health services, counseling and a space for sleeping, for listening and for interaction among men who have sex with men (MSM) and female sex workers. She worked there for five years until she moved to serve the MPG.

What does love look like when one works with the key affected populations - the injecting drug users, MSMs, sex workers, those who live in abject poverty and with limited choices in life? Having visited the work of TOP in Yangon, I ask myself a question on how we can talk about the issues of key affected population within our churches. Often, key affected populations are invisible in our churches, yet some of them are part of our church.

It is difficult to talk about other sexual practices. The easiest way is to condemn



Rev. Dr. Arthur Ko Lay. Breaking down barriers to overcome stigma and discrimination.

or to say, "love the sinner but not their sin." Still this statement sounds judgmental. Certainly, Jesus included prostitutes and drunkards in his ministry. To the self-righteous persons who were about to throw stones on a woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, "Those who are without sin, cast the first stone." He appreciated the woman from the city as she poured perfume on his feet and anointed him. He conversed with the Samaritan woman who had many husbands and even revealed to her that he was the Messiah, the one who gives the living water, making the woman leave the jar to announce to others what she had learned.

Often we think of changing other people's lives without delving into the context and the complexities of life itself, and also reflecting on our very lives ourselves. Could Jesus be referring to us as "the other sheep" that need to be ministered unto (John 10:16a) so that we can be open to challenge our religious dogmas and cultures and shape our faith according to God's loving and welcoming ways?

Meeting church leaders in Cambodia. Cambodia ranks third to Thailand and Burma, respectively, when it comes to the number of PLWHAs.

HIV has put a spotlight on many issues in our society. What does it mean to love people who have taken a different path? I believe that we must give a space for listening to the stories of people or just to provide a space for people to reflect together without any judgmental attitude. I think that this is a difficult ministry and I was happy that there is such a place

like TOP to demonstrate what love can look like.

Other faith groups are also demonstrating that love goes beyond boundaries. Ratana Metta Organization is one Buddhist organization set up in different parts of Myanmar that has also demonstrated what love looks like. In fact, the word "metta" means loving kindness. We visited the clinic just near the gate of the Shwedagon Pagoda, run by committed medical doctors, certified counselors, nurses, storekeepers, community organizers, development workers and trainers. One of the personnel was a Baptist active in the church women's group, Mrs. Helen Lun Pum. Like other organizations in Myanmar, they have established Self Help Groups to assist people living with HIV and AIDS meet their other needs.

One of the problems raised in Myanmar is that anti-retroviral drugs are sold to brokers and the MPG members told us that many of their peers have needs that are not met due to meager income. The income of widows served by the Myanmar Council of Churches ranged from US \$1-2/ day or around 900-2,000 kyats. They need additional income to take care of their and their children's needs.

The Phoenix Association has gone a step further in that people living with HIV are working as weavers in their loom, tailors, and bag makers. They have laundry and



photocopying services, and computer literacy training. With new funds available they are now building houses for people living with HIV and were affected by cyclone Nargis.

In Myanmar, all the organizations that we visited are making a difference and demonstrating what love can be like if we serve others without stigma and discrimination. We visited and met with the Churches Action Against AIDS (CASA) of the Myanmar Baptist Church and the Simee Self Help Group organized by the Methodist Church in Upper Myanmar, the Salvation Army's Capacity Building Programs and Livelihood Training, the Myanmar Council of Churches' HIV and AIDS Prevention and Care Program, Interfaith Youth Coalition on AIDS, the Cholia Muslim Religious Trust Funds, and the Karuna Myanmar Social Services of the Catholic Bishop Conference of Myanmar. These groups have now united to form the Myanmar Interfaith Network on AIDS (MINA) as an outcome of the interfaith consultation conducted by the Myanmar Council of Churches on November 17. Again MINA is a demonstration of love in action because the faith-based organizations realize that sharing of resources and experiences will scale up their response to HIV.

Our visit to Phnom Penh, Cambodia on November 12-15 also showed that the Kampuchea Christian Council is now ready to meet the challenge of building HIV Competent Churches. They are scheduling capacity building workshops. Those who were trained by the Church of Christ in Thailand's AIDS Ministry have been visiting hospitals and people living with HIV and AIDS but they expressed the need for more training. There are organizations in Cambodia like the Cambodian HIV and AIDS Education and Care that is active in various districts and provinces in providing home-based care and livelihood to people living with HIV and AIDS. They have trained district leaders and linked with district hospitals for the care and support of people living with HIV and AIDS.

CCA also conducted awareness building on HIV and AIDS in Dili, East Timor on September 11 - 12, 2009. There the



Taking seriously the HIV and AIDS ministry. CPBC pastors Cecil de la Cruz and Tita Grace Padojinog, Rev. Job Santiago, CPBC general secretary, Semie Asturias and Dr. Senturias at a workshop break.

need is more training on Gender Justice and Sexuality. Women are saying that domestic violence and incest exist among many families.

The Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches invited me to their HIV and AIDS Awareness Workshop in Romblon, Philippines on July 18, 2009 and there I found that pastors and lay leaders are really interested to care and to show their love.

What does love look like? The late Doreen Potter's response was: "Look at your brother beside you. Look at your sister beside you. Look. Listen. Care." HIV and AIDS give us the possibility to demonstrate love. Much more needs to be done to eliminate stigma and discrimination, advocate for universal access to medicine, nutrition and care, promote human rights and human dignity, and open our eyes to the needs around us.

May we seek to understand more fully the gift of love that we received from Jesus Christ as we celebrate Advent this year.

Erlinda N. Senturias

Building inclusive communities

Inclusive communities of peace for all can only be built when women and children, along with men, experience fullness of life and harmony with all creation.

To build inclusive communities of peace CCA has moved from "women's concerns" to "gender justice" in its program direction, with an aim to open a new arena for women and men to study gender power relations and inequalities wrought by socially constructed gender roles in a patriarchal system. Factors of class, caste, race/ethnicity need to be analyzed as they intersect and impact on gender relations. Many blocks, both personal and structural, need to be broken down in order to attain gender justice.

which affects all. Men also need to be liberated in order to practice and promote gender justice.

Asian churches have failed to address violence in its various forms that impacts not only women but the entire family and community. Violence is even perpetuated in the form of religious sanctions justified by patriarchal interpretations of the Bible.

The Gender Justice Training Course

CCA initiated the Asian School of Ecumenical Formation for Gender Justice, an intensive training for trainers, aimed to develop the capacity of both men and women church leaders in promoting gender justice. Twenty-one men, women



Mercy Kappen, one of the resource persons, facilitating a group activity on the web of gender injustices

Many church leaders in Asia still think that gender justice is an agenda of, and for women only, and that women's empowerment is possible only when women alone are liberated. However, women's empowerment alone does not eliminate violence that has permeated various structures of society.

Both men and women are victims and agents of patriarchy, a societal disease

and youth leaders attended the School held on September 14 to 25, 2009 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This year the school was specially offered for church leaders coming from the Mekong countries of Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and for Timor Leste, where.

Men, women and Gender Justice
Men like Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai



Exposure visit to the Provincial Operation Center on the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (POCHT) in Chiangrai.
L-R: Janejinda Pawadee, Mercy Kappen, social worker Supranee Somana, and Moumita Biswas.

Lama and Jesus have gone beyond male stereotypes. Men participants shared how they can overcome patriarchal conditioning and analyze why men perpetuate violence. Men can learn from Jesus' being a listening and caring man in the account of the bleeding woman in Mark. Instead of dismissing women's stories or voices as trivial, men should take women seriously.

Women participants admitted that they are guilty of preserving and reinforcing patriarchal norms at home and in society. Many women as mothers are guilty of raising their sons with more privileges than their daughters, in effect perpetuating a male-centered and male-dominated consciousness among young people. The challenge for women therefore is to foster a gender-fair and -inclusive upbringing of children.

Insights from participants

Mr Douk Samnang, youth secretary of the Kampuchea Christian Council: "those who have been trained will do some follow-up activities in cooperation with local member churches and expecting support from CCA".

Mrs. Leocadia de Jesus from Timor Leste: "immense violation of human rights happens in my country, and women and children are suffering the most. Now is

the time for healing and reconciliation. Promoting gender justice is one way in which the church can play a key role in my country to heal and overcome violence. The school helped me strategize on how church leaders can promote gender justice and become agents of change. I will share this skill with other leaders in the Igreja Protestante Iha Timor Loro Sae."

Gender Budgeting

According to Mr. Billy Kan Myint, youth secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches, it is very important in an Asian context for men church leaders to be gender sensitized. Dialogue between men and women is important in working towards overcoming violence against women. Churches need to formulate and implement gender justice policies. Church leaders also need to be trained on gender-fair budgeting to ensure gender justice in church programming.

What Ms Phuong Huyen Thi Nguyen from Vietnam enjoyed the most is that "participants were also resource persons and we learnt from one another. We were all so involved in the process and activities. Follow up activities are necessary in our country."

Moumita Biswas

A Just and sustainable world



A worker in Vietnam taking a rest from a tiring day.
(Photo: Janejinda Pawadee)

“My name is Jaay. I am 22 years old from the Burma border near China. I came to Thailand three years ago. It took me six days and seven nights to reach the Burma-Thai border. I paid money to an agent to take me to Chiangmai city.

“My first job in Chiangmai was in a construction site. I earned 160 Baht (USD 5) a day. After four months I changed to another job in a small grocery and earned 160 Baht a day. I left the job after a few months because the employer paid me very late every month. I then worked as a bus boy for two years. Now I’m working as a security guard in one hotel in Chiangmai.

“My life was very hard in Burma because there was not enough to earn a living. We have to pay money to a soldier whenever they want. But in Thailand, we’re working hard to collect money to send home for our parents and families. Their hope is in our hands and responsibilities since there is huge poverty in Burma.

“In Thailand, it’s difficult to live if we do not have a worker’s card.. To register for a worker’s card, I have to pay 3,800 Baht

(USD 120) a year. It’s our one month earning and many workers cannot afford to pay. If we do not have an employer to guarantee for us, we have to pay a bit more to hire someone to pose and sign a paper for us.

“To be arrested by the Thai police is common to us migrant workers. But we have no choice. For me, to be arrested by the Thai police is better than getting arrested by Burma’s soldiers.

“At least here there is hope for us to earn some money to send home. But if we live in Burma and are unemployed, our families will have no food to eat.....”

This is the voice of Jaay heard through Janejinda Pawadee, coordinator of the Mekong Ecumenical Partnership Program (MEPP) who spoke during a panel presentation together with Chiangmai’s local government agencies at the AGAPE Consultation on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology on November 2 to 6, 2009, in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The consultation was jointly organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) and hosted by the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT).

Forced by extreme poverty, political repression and ecological destruction, people migrate to developing countries like Thailand. An estimated two million migrant workers - the most vulnerable sector to human trafficking and exploitation - are in Thailand, a sending, receiving and transit country for migrant workers.

Government panelists from the Provincial Social Development and Human Security Office and Chiang Mai Community Development Provincial Office shared about the ‘sufficiency economy’ model of growth being observed in Thailand, which aims to make a community produce sufficiently to support its members. Said to be granted to the people of Thailand by His Majesty the King, it also assumes that the community or a family owns a piece of land to cultivate to be self-sufficient.

However, Ms. Pawadee said that the indigenous Lahu people, who migrate to the city and lost land to tourism development investors, do not have anything to start on. The model remains abstract for the common Thai people.

For a newly industrialized economy which is agriculturally-based, land constitutes the basic requirement for self-sustainability and sufficiency. Additionally, the model would also be challenged by self-sustainability. Would a community be able to sustain self-sufficiency in the face of aggressive market forces?

While Thailand may be South East Asia's second biggest economy, it is not spared from the grave economic downturn and complex local political turmoil that Asia experiences.

Asia, whose vulnerability in terms of climatological features is further aggravated by poverty and massive exploitation even in disaster situations, showcases the poverty-wealth-ecology links, according to the research report presented by IBON Foundation, a research think-tank based in the Philippines.

More than one-half of the Third World's poor live in Asia. Viewed as a dynamic and promising place to multiply capitalist profit,

Asia now plunges deep into poverty, thus reducing the resilience and adoptability of Asians to sharp climate changes.

However, grassroots people who live everyday in poverty view poverty not as a problem, but a phenomenon within an exploitative system. As Junaid Ahmad, a young Pakistani Muslim academic and resource person at the consultation said succinctly, "unsustainable systems are unsustainable". Our current exploitative lifestyles and systems are not anymore tenable for humanity and the Earth.

The challenge therefore to the churches in Asia is to struggle together with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized of the earth, to get out of the current exploitative system that runs the world, and build a just and sustainable one.

Liza B. Lamis

L-R: Sopa Songkram, Manusaporn Bhamorbutr, Utaiwan Minsuwan, all from Chiang Mai provincial development agency offices; Warangkana Imudom, an economist from the Bank of Thailand; and Janejinda Pawadee, MEPP.



Disturbing our comfortable faith

Disturbing our comfortable faith and narrow mindedness." "Bringing together participants from different countries to ecumenically reflect upon the unity of the church, humankind and renewal of creation." "Making the concept of ecumenism clearer and planting the ecumenical spirit among participants."

This was how three participants described the recent Asian Ecumenical Course held in Shrachi Center, Kolkata, India on 18-30 October.

Under the theme, "Living Together in the Household of God - Towards a Wider Ecumenism," 23 participants from 8 countries in Asia completed the two-week course. The AEC objective was to equip younger generation of leaders with a wider ecumenical perspective so they can pass this on to their respective communities, help create a more conscientized constituency that is fully grounded in their own faith but committed to work for the wider unity of people and with the rest of creation.

Of the 23 participants who came from Australia, Bangladesh, China/Hong Kong, India, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, 10 were women. Participants included graduate students in theology, teachers in seminaries and secular education, pastors, and workers with NGOs, evangelist training center and ecumenical organizations. Most of the participants came from CCA member churches while a few came from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Missionary Alliance backgrounds.

"The pioneers and leaders of the ecumenical vision are the people, not the church hierarchy. In Asia, active involvement in the life situations of the people and meeting the needs and issues of their life is the starting point of the ecumenical movement. Making others as friends and having fellowship with people of other faiths as brothers and sisters are the way to wider ecumenism. But the wider ecumenism can be attained only when the whole creation celebrates its life in fullness." Thus summarized Robert

Gladstone who was both a resource person on the history of the ecumenical movement and a full-time participant from India.



The Rev. Dr. A Wati Longchar, dean of SCEPTRE (DMin program) of Serampore College, who also served as dean of this year's AEC, opened the program with a message based on the story of the feast in God's kingdom - where everyone, especially the least, are also welcomed.

Presentations by resource persons were on various perspectives of ecumenism - from union church, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, NCC, CCA, Dalit, Tribal, feminist, ecology, interfaith, social activist, student movement, and church and pastoral

perspectives. Many resource persons referred to the root word of oikoumene, i.e. oikos, which is commonly shared by economics, ecumenism and ecology. Hence, the wider ecumenism has to do with life in all its socio-economic-political dimensions, not only of humanity regardless of faith or ideology, but of all creation.

Another reality is on the ordination of women - with certain denominations affirming that women can never be ordained because of the tradition of male apostolic succession. Another reality is the inherited belief that "outside Christianity there is no salvation" which often makes interfaith dialogue and cooperation difficult. The idea of regarding ourselves as only a part of creation rather than its crowning glory was also very challenging to some participants who insisted that human beings were made only "a little lower than angels".

Since the issue of decriminalizing same-sex relations in India was still hot in the country, questions kept being raised about it in the discussion groups. However, some participants felt that such a topic would be hard to take back to their countries.

AEC has four components: community building, Asian reality, ecumenical vision and leadership training. Immersion to Indian realities included visits to Mother Teresa House and one of her homes for malnourished and disabled children and orphans; visits to Ram Krishna Mission and the temple of the goddess Kali; and to Sona Gachi, the red light district in Kolkata. AEC was held at a time when a series of puja (Hindu festivals) was happening in Kolkata - including the washing or cleansing in the Hoogly (Ganges) River.

Towards the close of the AEC, participants worked on their respective action plans - describing what they intended to do with their learning after returning home from AEC. Each participant presented their plan to the rest of the group on the last day of AEC, while other participants listened, asked questions and helped to clarify or sharpen the action plan. The program culminated with a closing worship, with Bishop Ashok Biswas of the CNI Kolkata Diocese giving the inspirational message and handing out the certificates of attendance.

Many participants have continued to be in touch with each other after the program, exchanging what they have done so far to share what they learned from AEC - e.g. through the chapel service at their seminaries; or through sharing with their classmates, colleagues, and families.



The 2009 AEC participants

Despite the explanations on the wider ecumenism as the only way to go in Asia, certain obstacles remain as difficult hurdles for the way forward. These include the reality that certain denominations cannot share the Eucharist with other Christians because of differences in their beliefs in transubstantiation (actual transformation of the Eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ) or consubstantiation (memorial meaning of the elements as presence of Christ).

Hope S. Antone

Going beyond Tozanso

Re-commitment to peace, development and security in the Korean Peninsula

October 21-23, 2009 marked another ecumenical milestone in continuing efforts at reunification in the Korean peninsula. One hundred-thirty-five church leaders, academics, and peace advocates gathered at the Hill Top Country Club in Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong in a consultation and celebration of twenty-five years of ecumenical efforts at reunification of the two Koreas which started in Tozanso, Japan in 1984.

The consultation highlighted the developments, challenges and possibilities, recognizing the realities of both the North and South Korea. Different perspectives on geopolitics in the two Koreas were presented by academics and ecumenical leaders, including Dr. Ninan Koshy, former Commission of International Affairs Director of the World Council of Churches(WCC). In his presentation, Dr. Koshy highlighted that (nuclear) deterrence is unacceptable to both WCC and the Vatican, and the "war on terror" tends to dictate the terms of geopolitics with forces outside the Peninsula playing adverse roles.

Two bible study sessions were led by Professors Choi Young Sil from South Korea and Angela Wong Wai Ching from Hong Kong on the theme of reconciliation of peoples and nations.

Different and at times at odds with each other were perspectives on reconciliation

and reunification presented in a panel by Dr. Chu Shulong from China, Dr. Maaïke Okana-Heijman from the Netherlands with a Japanese perspective, and Prof. Alexander Federovsky from Russia.

The United States plays a crucial role in diffusing tensions and promoting multilateral security in East Asia in both the presentations of Prof. Peter Van Ness of the USA and Prof. Sachio Nakato of Japan, with the latter focusing on the 6-Party talks and the need for a negotiated peace process. Inter-Korean cooperation in the field of economic development was cited by Dr. Leonid Petrov, a visiting professor from Australia in one of the sessions.

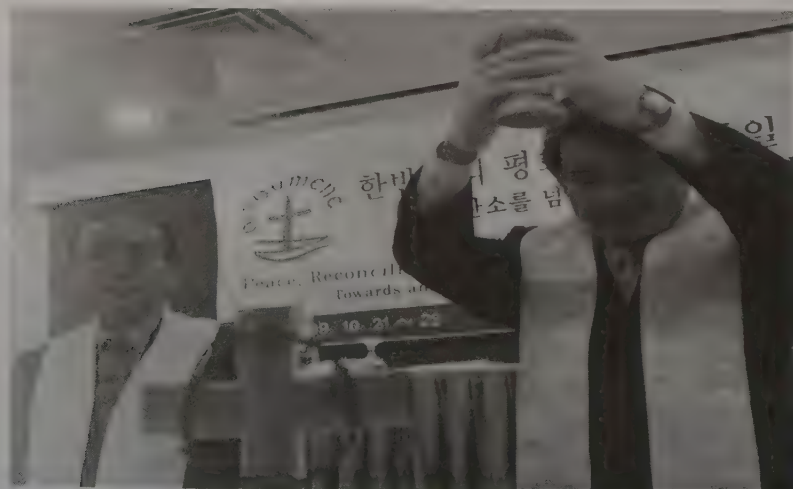
In the meantime, participants from the Korean Christian Federation representing churches in North Korea, emphasized the Korean peoples as the subject of reunification, the need to withdraw all hostile US policies on North Korea, and to put in practice the recommendations from both the 15 June 2000 and 4 October 2007 declarations, one committing to reunification, the latter spelling out further steps.

The final declaration expressed in the Tsuen Wan Communiqué, calls for the following:

- *urging the USA to withdraw its hostile policies towards the DPRK, and advocating for the cessation of all multinational military exercises in and around the Korean peninsula;*
- *encouraging the international community to allow space and time for direct negotiations between North and South Korea towards a lessening of tensions between them and towards peace, reconciliation and reunification;*
- *supporting the WCC's statements and initiatives towards a world free of all nuclear weapons;*
- *encouraging the Christians of North and South Korea to celebrate a turning point in their endeavors for peace and reunification at the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea, in 2013.*

The Rev. Kang Yong Sop, chair of the Korea Christian Federation of North Korea, and the Rev. Tae Jin Bae, of the National Council of Churches of Korea concelebrating the Eucharist at the consultation.

The full Tsuen Wan Communiqué can be accessed at the CCA web site www.cca.org.hk



Charlie Ocampo

Revitalizing the ecumenical movement in Aotearoa NZ

“The ecumenical movement in New Zealand is in critical situation right now.

Not many people are interested and want to talk about ecumenism.” Thus said Rev. Agnus Macleod, former General Secretary of the Baptist Church.

“This is my first time to attend and hear about the ecumenical movement”, one pastor stated at the ecumenical gathering in Christchurch.

The dissolution of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand five years ago signaled the decline of the ecumenical movement in the country. Without this national ecumenical link, each member church turns its focus inward and does its mission individually.

The lack of communication between the ecumenical bodies and member churches in New Zealand has aggravated the situation.

These sentiments were expressed during an ecumenical visit to Aotearoa New Zealand by a team from Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches on 2-10 November 2009. The team consisted of CCA General Secretary Dr. Prawate Khid-arn WCC representatives Mr. Douglas Chial (Church and Ecumenical Relations) and Ms. Tara Tautari (Ecumenical Formation and Lay Leadership Training).

Made possible upon the invitation of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, the visit covered member churches in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and concluded at the Methodist Conference in Christchurch on 9 November where the visiting team addressed the conference.

Church leaders expressed worry about the future of the ecumenical movement in New Zealand. Ecumenical leaders including Rev. John Roberts, Rev. Bob Scott, Rev. Pamela Tankersley and others are working hard to revitalize it, hopeful that a new ecumenical network will be formed.



Church leaders in Aotearoa NZ with Dr. Prawate Khid-arn

They raised two major concerns: the ecumenical formation of the youth and the “migrant church”.

“The most urgent task in reviving the ecumenical movement in this country is to seriously focus on ecumenical education among the youth and lay leaders of the church”, Rev. John England, former CCA staff, commented.

An ecumenical conference on “Mission and Unity: Then, Now and into the Future” for churches in New Zealand will be held on 18-19 June 2010 at Wesley Hall, St. John’s Theological College, Auckland. It will be an opportunity not only to reshape the churches’ approach to world mission which can lead to the emergence of the 20th century ecumenical movement.

CCA has four member churches in New Zealand including the Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand; the Methodist Church of New Zealand; the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand; and the Religious Society of Friends.

Prawate Khid-arn

Climate Change and tourism

*'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it...'
(Ps. 24, 1-2).*

We need to communicate the truth of this as the world is at a major crossroads on climate change which has the serious potential to devastate several parts of the world, especially the third world including Asia. The world is waiting to see what the upcoming COP (Conference of the Parties) 15 in Copenhagen will deliver. Called a 'Call for Action', the Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT) has issued a Statement endorsed by several bodies including the Christian Conference of Asia, the Pacific Conference of Churches, the National Council of Churches in India Commission on Justice Peace and Creation, the Church of Bali, Asian Muslim Action Network, Equations India. This Statement expresses a South position and will be presented at a COP 15 side event, which will also be attended by the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). The following article is based on this Statement but a full text is available from office@ecotonline.org

Climate Justice and Tourism

People are at the heart of this Call for Action. Local communities in developing societies who have contributed least to global warming will be among the first to suffer its devastating consequences. Some are already experiencing them. As with the overall model of development, climate change illustrates the growing urgency for a paradigm shift in the tourism industry, a sprawling industry ever in search of new destinations, including some to replace those threatened or disappearing due to global warming!

Greenhouse gas emissions - contributions from tourism

The global tourism industry is a significant contributor to climate change. However, it should be noted that just 2% of the world's population actively takes part in air passenger transport, contributing to tourism's share of global warming which is up to 12.5 % (if non-CO2 effects are taken into account). Aviation alone contributes

4.9% of this. Alarmingly, it is forecast that carbon emissions from tourism will grow by 162% in the period 2005-2035.

Integration of international aviation and maritime transport into mitigation agreements

The travel industry claims to be aware of their climate responsibility and to aspire to reduce carbon emissions. However, international air transport is the biggest source of tourism emissions, but still remains exempt from the Kyoto Protocol. Given the urgency that global warming needs to be less than 2 degrees C, it is crucial that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) includes bunker emissions in its regulations.

Sustainable mitigation needed - Biofuels a false hope

Sensitive to the charge that they are unconcerned about the climate change impact of flying but still adhering to the growth path, the aviation industry and the tourism sector have recently been hailing the development of "sustainably grown biofuels". These so-called sustainable biofuels constitute a panacea so that the 'business-as-usual' mode can continue. Environmental and development organisations claim that these alleged "sustainable biofuels" lack appropriate safeguards. Using them on high commercial levels simply cannot be sustainable. Massive land, resources and energy will be needed, so that the outcome cannot really contribute to reducing global warming.

Poverty alleviation: the myths of tourism
The UNWTO, like some tourism dependent nations, argues that a regulative framework for limiting growth of emissions from shipping and aviation could have negative impacts on tourism revenues that contribute to poverty alleviation in developing countries. The groups endorsing this Call for Action state from their experience that the idea that tourism alleviates poverty is a myth. It must be questioned how much of the income generated from tourism contributes to the national and local economy with what

part of this eventually reaching the poor and does not 'leak out' through foreign-owned tour operators, airlines, cruise companies, hotel chains, and food and drink imports. While tourism may bring economic benefit to few in the shorter term, in many places such benefits are likely to be overshadowed by the impact of climate change and other aspects of tourism.

A paradigm shift

A broad and urgent paradigm shift is called for the tourism sector:

- The tourism sector must come under binding emission regulations. Accurate and reliable methods to calculate emissions in tourism should be used.
- The UNWTO needs to set for its members clear emission reduction targets with timelines rather than leave it to self regulation which has been ineffective, and is unacceptable. National governments should be held accountable for the climate impact of their policies.
- Market-based mechanisms and false climate solutions such as Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD), agrofuels, carbon trading are not acceptable. Developed

countries must reduce their emissions at home.

- Climate protection in tourism requires a significant transformation of mass tourism. Small scale, fair, just, people-centred tourism should be given a much higher attention.
- Nations highly dependent on tourism need to develop alternative sources of income to become less dependent on this highly vulnerable and often devastating industry.

Tourism does not always alleviate poverty and it creates environmental and social damages. The profits gained from tourism are repatriated to powerful investors, while its damaging effects remain with local communities. It is now time for the tourism industry to take measures that will take into account the people without whom tourism would not be possible. A fair and just tourism model must be developed.

Caesar D'Mello

Climate justice now!, activists demanded during the UNFCCC in Bangkok, Thailand in October 2009.
(Photo: PfL and CONTAK Phils.)



Freedom and healing

Interview with Berlin Guerrero after his release from prison



Berlin Guerrero with wife Mylene

On 17 September, Charlie Ocampo (CO) met with the Rev. Berlin Guerrero (BG), a UCCP minister who was detained by the Philippine military for seventeen months and was released under the custody of his bishop in the UCCP recently. He very happily agreed to this interview for CCA News at the UCCP Shalom Center in Manila, Philippines.

CO: How will you describe your detention experience after being released?

BG: The sounds of prison, the violence inflicted on innocent detainees, and the reality of concrete walls felt real. I now know how it feels to be dehumanized. I have learned that being a Christian is to not be complacent while violence and injustice are being inflicted on people. To be Christ like is to suffer the consequences of speaking the truth against violence and injustice committed against people whom Jesus loved and died for.

CO: What helps in your healing process?

BG: Preaching the word to members of my church makes it easier to move from anger and helplessness towards sharing the word with Christians to make them more aware of their calling in the midst of injustice and violence. Christ has been with me all throughout my imprisonment. He was suffering with me, so I was not alone to bear the pain and experience humiliation. The experience bordering the saintly and the heroic is akin to a conversion experience exemplified by Apostle Paul.

CO: How did your church members react and respond to your imprisonment?

BG: There was a mixed reaction. Some were amazed by my faith affirmation, not giving up in spite of the mental and physical torture. Some were loathe to condemning my tormentors. Others remained unquestioning of the context that led to my imprisonment.

CO: Did you experience rejection as a consequence of your imprisonment?

BG: For one, I was refused an entry visa to the US to speak before churches that gave me moral and material support during my time in prison. I was not offered a church assignment. I am hoping that acceptance will ease my recovery from the pain and trauma of detention. To my surprise, I got an offer to pastor a small congregation, which will encourage church members who supported me throughout my detention and provide me with opportunities to minister and educate my parishioners on the gospel mandate of serving the needs and standing for the rights of the disadvantaged whose basic rights are being violated.

CO: Do you have other plans for the future?

BG: I personally prefer a local church assignment. Resuming pastoral care of

a congregation will help me overcome the pain and trauma. I am also engaged in prison ministry, and currently getting advance training in clinical pastoral education (CPE) for the next two years.

CO: How do you describe the present political situation relative to that under the Marcos dictatorship?

BG: Under Marcos, the Filipinos experienced glaring fascism. Today's situation can be described as a semblance of democracy hidden in velvet gloves but the military forces employ violence at will. During the Marcos Martial law regime, there seemed to be a stronger and more organized resistance motivated by faith, as seen among the basic Christian communities. Today the resistance is more silent and lacks collective strength. Those who benefited from people's power, the silent majority, are now opposed to the need for radical social transformation. The political situation remains confused and volatile.

CO: Do you see hope in this situation?

BG: There is hope beyond armed resistance through the open mass movement and the strengthening of the parliamentary struggle through elections. There is an increase in political participation through the party-list system allowing representatives of the popular mass movement to sit in Congress. This assumes that the 2.6 million potential voters will be able to vote. There is also the

promise of better work among coalitions of people's organizations. There seems to be a strong NGO movement alongside the organized progressive movement.

CO: Do you see any other challenge for the present?

BG: In light of the inability of government in power to provide for basic needs, the mass exodus of Filipinos for overseas will continue. Wherever migrant Filipinos find themselves, it is hoped that they will continue to witness to the need for structural change in their country of birth and to support the families and communities they left behind. These are precursors of social change as developing critical mass of awareness will continue in many places. In practical terms, the Filipino migrant diaspora can be encouraged to combine the "Balikbayan" program with exposure to local realities facilitated by local churches.

CO: Thank you, Berlin. May the God of justice and peace continue to accompany you in your faith journey and in your healing.

For more insights into accounts of detention, torture and killing of church workers, you may view the film documentary, "The United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Hamon ng Panahon" (Challenge of the Times), available at the UCCP website <http://www.uccp.org.ph/>

The Cost of Discipleship

Church people victims from January 2001 to present

- Killed: 28
(12 clergy, 6 layworkers, 8 members who were active in their respective church leadership bodies or mandated organizations, and 2 Methodist Church members who committed suicide to escape further torture from the hands of the military)
- Tortured and illegally detained: 7
- Forcibly disappeared: 1
- Accused with fabricated charges: 2

(Source: NCC Philippines)

A Letter from the hemorrhaging woman

(Mark 5:24-32)

My dear Brothers and Sisters:

I am the hemorrhaging woman. And just like many other women in scriptures, I am unnamed. Like me, people living with HIV and Aids today are also unnamed. I can easily identify myself with them.

We are not only unnamed; we cannot be named. Naming would shame not only us but also our family, our community and church. Society is not willing to name our plight because to name us and our condition is to name the sin of the community, the sin of stigma and discrimination.

My culture's unspoken law of purity made me untouchable, in a permanent state of shame. I was made to withdraw from human touch, to refuse giving or receiving comfort, love and support in any physical way, lest I spread my own 'pollution' to others. And all these because of something that has happened to me beyond my control, something I could not either start or stop. I was isolated due to my constant bleeding.

Like me, people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) remain silent for fear of being cast out of one's community. Some of your churches today do not only refuse to hear us; they also silence us by shaming us. We have very little support or none at all. We suffer alone and are divested of family, church and friends' support because of shame. In many instances, a PLWHA is even blamed for her condition.

Let me go back to my own story:

I suffered alone. No one advocated for me. So I decided to approach Jesus in a surreptitious manner. "If only I could touch the hem of his clothes, I will be healed," I thought. I knew I could be healed. I even violated the social codes and religious laws to claim healing without permission from anyone, not even from Jesus. I went to "steal my own healing"!

My decision to touch Jesus meant that his power could cure me and free me from the strictures of my fear. My utter desperation bred a radical faith. I knew that my effort could produce more shame. I also knew it would lead me to healing.

My faith drew power from Jesus. It made me brave the crowd and break the social convention that banned me from the public. I knew I had to break out of silence and isolation. My will and courage to seek healing elicited the will of Jesus and his courage to hear.

"Who touched me?" asked Jesus. He did not accept my invisibility. When I heard Jesus, I got frightened and I trembled. I recognized the extraordinary divine power Jesus possessed.

But the book of Mark does not tell you what I said. I told Jesus my story. When stories are told and heard, they become powerful challenges for transformation, both for the teller and the hearer. After listening to me, Jesus said: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (RSV). Jesus affirmed and blessed me! Instantly my flow of blood ceased. I experienced salvation and healing in and through my body, my body that is sick and 'defiled'. Wholeness was embodied right there and then.

I was amazed that Jesus allowed himself to be interrupted during a busy day with a planned healing visitation. On the way he heard my story. Of course I had to tell him my story, because he refused my invisibility and silence. I told it within the hearing distance of the disciples.

My talking with Jesus could have made him unclean. Nevertheless, Jesus restored me to purity and included me in community, by calling me "daughter". At last, I had affinity and belongingness to a community! In the first place, I should have belonged to a community. I should have not been ostracized because of my bleeding. Jesus made justice a reality for me right there and then.

This Jesus displayed a unique sense of sensitivity to my 'touch' of desperation despite the thickness of the crowd and the busy-ness of his schedule. His heart went out to those who were like me, for Jesus was just like us, afflicted by pain and suffering. He embodied care and courage to hear, and faced condemnation for ignoring cultural norms.

My action may have even helped free Jesus from patriarchal assumptions and male privilege of his culture. After listening to my story, Jesus was never the same again. I believe our encounter reminded Jesus that I, too, deserve justice, no less, in the form of healing.

Jesus today remains a living challenge "as a breaker of rules and expectations ...subverting the status quo in order to create new possibilities of human community." So was I. I hope that you are, too.

Lifting up stories like mine would lead you to the possibility of a new community with a great sense of compassion translated into deeds of justice.

The thought that "HIV = Sex = Punishment = Death" is not found in the example and teaching of Jesus.

Jesus challenges us to be more like him, willing to be interrupted and 'defiled' through taking care of those living with HIV and AIDS; willing to be challenged and changed by the stories of these people; willing to erase stigma and shame; willing to restore their dignity and worth. For I am sure the church is not spared from HIV and AIDS. The Body of Christ, too, is plagued with HIV and Aids.

To let the people living with HIV and Aids speak is to hear them. To name them and to take care of them is making justice real today. In so doing, you become a living testimony to the God of Justice and Compassion who is the God of Jesus, as well as ours.

Your sister, the hemorrhaging woman

In response to the above letter given as a Bible Study by Liza Lamis during the HIV and AIDS Awareness Seminar in Timor Leste on August 11, 2009, the participants wrote the following letter:

Dear Friends in the Churches:

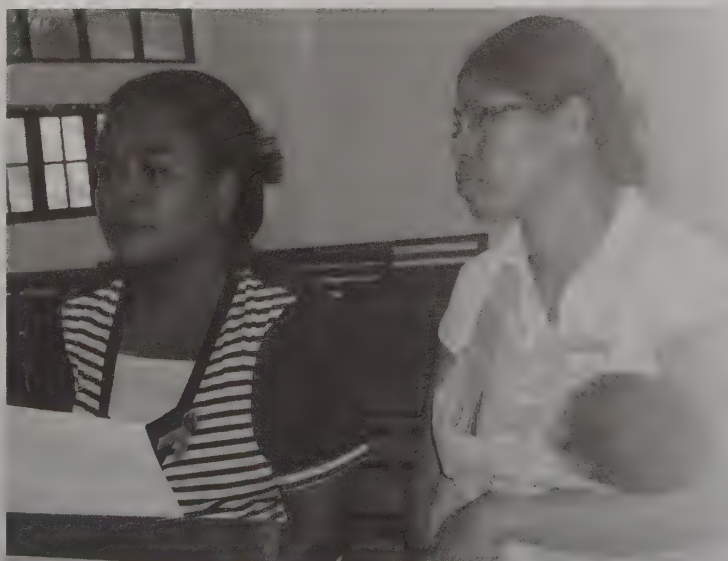
In a few moments our workshop will finish. We want to share our message to the churches in Asia with all our hope that we will be able to support those who live with HIV and AIDS, so that they will regain their humanity and confidence, and they will never feel discriminated or marginalized within family, church and nation.

If we do not say "NO!" to discrimination and stigma as we learned through some pictures a while ago, then we are no different from the HIV virus that shatters our dignity as human beings. We have to support those who live with HIV and AIDS with prayers, real action such as caring, loving and embracing them. Also, we need to show them the way where they can get support and protection like hospitals, clinics, etc.

The enduring support that we have is our faith and our trust in Jesus Christ. By faith and trust in Jesus, like the one demonstrated by the bleeding woman in the Bible story, we can be healed. Let us also love each other as taught by Jesus in Matthew 22:37.

Your sisters in Jesus Christ,

Church Women of Timor Leste



Some of the women participants at the HIV and AIDS Awareness Seminar in Timor Leste in August 2009, conducted by CCA

Some thoughts on my internship

I used to be very satisfied with my life. I used to take everything very lightly. I was not very much aware of concerns of youth and women, nor was I interested in social and political issues.

In April 2009 I was selected for internship with CCA in Thailand. I thank God for the opportunity to be trained as a future ecumenical leader. Then I remember Jeremiah who was called by God. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I set you apart" (Jer. 1:5). Really, this is true. God knew me even before I was born and had a special purpose for me. God helped me to prepare all my needs as an intern. I can say God prepares me for the ministry.

As intern I was initially tasked by my mentor, Joint Executive Secretary of CCA's Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) Ms. Moumita Biswas, to research about CCA. My readings gave me a better understanding about ecumenism and CCA's challenging ecumenical ministry in a multi-cultural, multi-religious Asia mired in massive poverty but with a few pockets of affluence.

As intern I attended the Grassroots Church Women Leaders and Activists

Capacity Enhancement training in Korea where I learned how grassroots church women leaders empower themselves. I discovered that women face similar issues of discrimination and abuse in church and society. I visited and learned about the work of women in the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) where I gained ideas for my future ministry with women. I visited a refugee camp where I witnessed abject poverty and understood more about the struggle of the Karen people for freedom.

I attended the General Council of the United Church of Canada (UCC) in August held in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. The UCC is a very welcoming church where lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBTs) are accepted. Initially I was surprised but I thought deeply about Jesus' earthly ministry where he welcomed everyone: poor, rich, or just getting by, ill or healthy, self made or educated, popular or loner, secure or full of doubts. I got more interested in the way Jesus accepted all regardless of age, race, class, gender orientation, or physical ability. We are not to judge; only God is to judge.

I also helped in organizing the Asian School of Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (ASEGY), which



Refugees whom Claudia met at the Karen Refugee camps. (Photo: Claudia Procula Narzary)



Claudia, third from the left, with other participants in Korea, and some factory workers. After her internship she will return to her church to be the first Bodo woman to be ordained by the CNI diocese of Eastern Himalaya, India.

this time mainly focused on the Mekong Region and aimed to raise awareness of both men and women about the urgency of gender justice and human rights. It is important to respect each other and to work together for change towards a just society. If we work in unity we can make the impossible possible.

The AGAPE consultation on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific organized by the World Council of Churches together with CCA made me reflect on the situation of the world where some people are very rich while many are very poor.

In my eight months of internship I tried to understand ecumenism and be an ecumenical young woman. I have improved my documentation and report writing skills which are useful in my leadership development.

Staying alone in Thailand gave me culture shocks as a girl coming from a rural and conservative setting. I learned to depend totally on God. I spent more time with God. When I faced difficulties I just cried.

God spoke to me through Psalm 121:1-2, reminding me that my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. So I rededicated my life to God. I even composed a song based on Proverbs 3: 5-12.

What struck me about CCA is the friendliness and the spirit of working together. The executive staffs are highly educated and very friendly. What I saw in them made me examine myself and how I should behave with people in my ministry. In CCA all of us come from different cultures, backgrounds and traditions but we respect each other equally and work together well. Respect and unity are good foundations of an ecumenical ministry.

Though we are different from each other in various ways, in God's eyes we are one and are to love each other equally. When I think about loving, John 15: 9 comes to mind: "As the Father has loved me, so I loved you. Now remain in my love".

Claudia Procula Narzary

KCC retreat

The Kampuchea Christian Council (KCC) held a retreat on 17-19 November 2009 in Sihanoukville, Kampong Som Province, for its executive committee, staff, and women and youth committee. Attended by twenty-three participants, the retreat focused on strengthening unity and establishing the policies of KCC. 'We are all one body and one spirit' was the theme based on Ephesians 4:3-4.

KCC president Pastor Oum Sovy challenged the participants by saying that separating, discriminating and

Former KCC president Rev Eang Chhun shared that Cambodia has passed the Dark Age in the 1970s, and since 1990, approximately 2,000 churches have grown in the country. Sixty-five percent of these churches are independent. He emphasized that an important ministry of KCC is to support these churches since they are poor and weak in missionary and theological capabilities.

Rev Huh Chun Jung, ecumenical co-worker of KCC, stressed that KCC first of all, should recognize the important



Rev. Huh (fourth from right, standing) with the KCC retreatants

fighting each other are acts obviously belonging to sin. Racial, political, class and social divisions have divided churches, which make the Body of Christ appear dysfunctional, the message of grace hidden, and the reign of God not advanced.

The president added that humility is necessary to achieve unity. Harmonious and balanced relationships can be achieved in serving each other humbly. The essence of unity is patience and thankfulness. Forbearance, love and the gentleness of Jesus Christ are ours to emulate, Pastor Oum Sovy continued.

roles of its Executive Committee and staff to fulfill its ministry actively, and to work closely with the member churches.

KCC aims to increase the current 102 member churches to 200 within 2010, and to intensify the training of pastors, women, and youth leaders in response to emerging needs of the Cambodian churches and society. A monthly newsletter will be published, and closer cooperation with CCA, WCC and development NGOs in Cambodia will be promoted.

Huh Chun Jung

Ecumenical visit to North Korea

Prior to the International Consultation on Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Towards an Ecumenical Vision Beyond the Tozanso Process in Hong Kong SAR, I joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation that visited churches in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on October 17 to 20, 2009 by invitation of the Korean Church Federation. Led by Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, WCC General Secretary, the team included Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, Ms. Christine Papazoglou, Mr. Mark Beach and Mr. Peter Williams, all of WCC. The visit aimed to share experiences and to search for further ecumenical cooperation and support.

The schedule was hectic from arrival till departure day, but it helped us understand better the situation of the people in the DPRK. We visited three historical places including the Mangyongdae, native home of former President Kim Il Sung, the Tower of the Juche (Self-reliance) Idea, the Arch of Triumph (Victory Gate), and the International Friendship Exhibition Hall in Mt. Myohyang.

On Sunday, October 18, the team visited the Bongsu and Chilgo Churches; and the

Sanam House Church. Rev. Dr. Kobia preached at Bongsu Church on the theme, "One Body of Christ". Around 200 people were present.

Another significant event was the conversation about the mission and the work of the KCF. Rev. Kang Yon Sop, together with Rev. Ri Jong Ro who is the Director of the International Affairs Department of the Central Committee of KCF, expressed their strong concerns on many important issues especially related to the reunification of Korea.

The Korean people keep reminding the world that the separation of Korea in 1945 after World War II was not the making of the Korean people, but was a secret agreement of the super power countries without any consideration of the Korean people.

The Koreans are crying for their families as well as for their national reunification. They appealed to the international consultation on the Tozanso Process to support the reunification movement. That is exactly what CCA hopes to happen: that there will only be one Korea and a united Korean people.

The delegation with members of a local church.

Prawate Khid-arm



South Asia Working Group plans initiatives in Colombo

Twenty church leaders representing member churches of the WCC and CCA met at the Pegasus Hotel in Colombo on 22-23 November 2009.

The working group adopted the name, "South Asia Ecumenical Forum on Peace and Security", with focus on advocacy, solidarity and networking. Themes for action responses include religious extremism, militarization and the arms race, justice and poverty, and human rights and the rule of law.

A Terms of Reference will be prepared which will incorporate a 3-year term for members' participation, information sharing, and theme focus for every

meeting. Members representing churches, YMCA, YWCA, SCM and global ecumenical partners will be invited to join the Forum.

On 23rd November, Mr. Santha Fernando, recently released from detention, joined the meeting and reflected on his experiences while in detention.

Charlie Ocampo, CCA Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service, and Dr. Matthews George Chunakara, WCC International Affairs Director are co-conveners of the Forum.

Charlie Ocampo

UCC General Committee Executive meets in Toronto



Charlie Ocampo
in a table group
meeting

The United Church of Canada's General Committee Executive (GCE) invited Charlie Ocampo to represent global partners and address the plenary by presenting the vision and programs of the Christian Conference of Asia on November 13 to 16, 2009, at the UCC Headquarters in Toronto, Canada.

Sixty-five members of the UCC's General Committee met for its first meeting in the 2009-2012 triennium at the Church House in Etiboke, Toronto, Canada.

Accountability Reports from the Moderator, Mardi Tindal and the General Secretary, Nora Sanders, introduced members of the GCE to the agenda for the meeting. Ms Tindal introduced the Moderator's

"Plan for Participating in God's Abundant Healing of Creation".

Agenda of the meeting included: governance education for GCE members, workflow priorities, and a report from the Finance Commission proposing radical simplification of administration and resources and strengthening mission relationships; alternative church court structures, candidacy pathway report, employment insurance and the millennium development goals.

In his theological reflection, former Moderator Bruce McLeod took on Mark's account of Jesus as always being ahead on the road. People need to see the church following Jesus into the broken world even into what the unchurched world desperately needs.

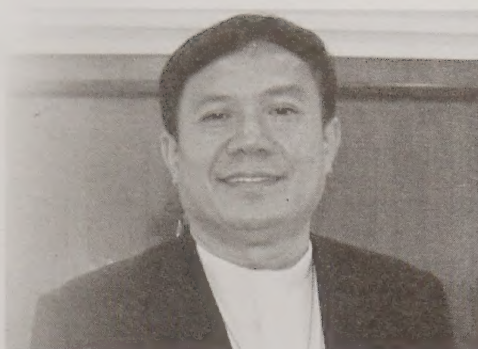
So the theology of leadership for Christians on the road is simply this: "Keep Jesus in sight. Stay amazed, and appropriately fearful, since the road leads, after all, through Jerusalem before we all get home."

The meeting also issued a statement expressing pastoral concerns around the holding of the Vancouver Olympics in 2012.

Charlie Ocampo

Social Service awardee

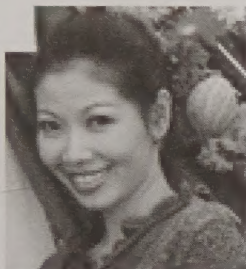
Rev. Sanan Wutti, Director of The Church of Christ in Thailand AIDS Ministry in Chiang Mai, Thailand received a social service award from the Thai Red Cross for his consistent work with people living with HIV and AIDS during more than two decades. The award was given on the occasion of World AIDS Day 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand on December 1st. A certificate and a trophy with image of candlelight were given to him.



Support Staff

Two women have joined as support staff of CCA.

Sasikhemmanut 'Aey' Pardpardejgorn worked with the English Department of the Faculty of Arts of Payap University as secretary for four and a half years before joining CCA as support staff for Faith, Mission and Unity (FMU) program area. Prior to joining Payap University, she worked with the Gussco Ltd. in the Region Industrial Estate in Lamphun Province. Aey looks forward

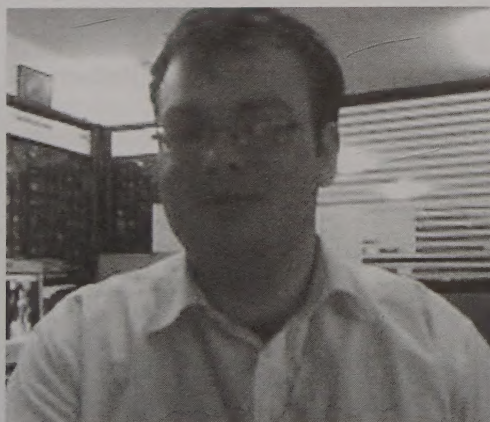


to a meaningful ecumenical ministry and is happy to be with CCA.

Chongkho 'Annie' Khlangdit is the new support staff for Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment (EGY) cluster. She was once a volunteer for the Thailand Open 2003, and in 2009 she joined Azure Blue for a month. Annie is a graduate of the South Pacific Bible College in Tauranga, Aotearoa New Zealand, and loves traveling as a pastime.



CCA Intern



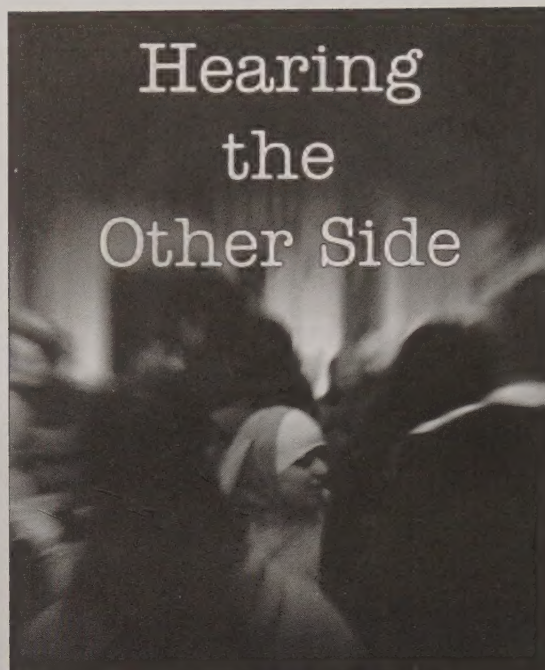
James Peter Ellis is the new CCA Intern to assist in organising and planning the 13th CCA General Assembly in April 2010. Originally from Sydney, he moved to Armidale to attend the University of New

England. He currently studies Sociology and Creative Arts. He will be starting theological studies at the beginning of 2010.

James is from the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), attending the Armidale congregation, which is a diverse group of people with many varied gifts and skills. He is involved in the wider work of UCA on a few levels including being a member of the triennial national assembly in July 2009.

James is currently undertaking a period of discernment, a requirement for anyone feeling a call to ordained ministry. James hopes to begin the process for ministry when he returns to Australia in May 2010.

Identity, faith and dialogue



CCA has supported "Building Bridges", a media project of World Council of Churches - World Youth Programme and Interchurch organisation for development cooperation (ICCO) Kerk in Actie by helping with the post-production of "Hearing the Other Side", a documentary film. The voices of young people in this film explore issues of identity, dialogue and impact of media on young Muslims, following the assassination of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 in the Netherlands. The honest opinions by the youth express the complexity of Muslim community in the Netherlands, which derive itself from religious, sufi and secular traditions. Influential actors of interfaith dialogue such as Karen Armstrong, Anil Ramdas, Rene Denan and Lucien van Liere also share their perspectives in this documentary film.

This project is a continuation of "Talking Faith" www.talkingfaith.org, a documentary film about Christian minorities and interfaith relations in post 9/11 Pakistan, developed as part of WCC Youth Internship Programme in 2007. Talking Faith has been screened both at the international and national film festivals, as well as educational institutions and

churches. This includes its screening at the 6th South Asian Independent Film Festival in Seattle, Plymouth Church conference on "youth in interfaith dialogue" and Foreign Correspondence Club in Thailand. In Pakistan it was an official selection and a special mention by the jury of Karachi International Film Festival (Kara), along with its screening at the Vasakh Film Festival by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in Lahore. "Talking Faith" will also be screened at SAFMA Documentary Film Festival in February 2010 in Lahore and Karachi.

This project has been carried out following the WCC 9th Assembly in 2006 in Porto Alegre, where interreligious dialogue was prioritised as one of the major tasks on the ecumenical agenda. This media initiative therefore aims to promote dialogue with youth in collaboration with churches, ecumenical organisations and religious organisations for the cause of peaceful and cohesive plural societies. Production of these films has been carried out by Naveen Qayyum, former consultant for communications at CCA from Pakistan. Details are available on www.hearingtheotherside.com

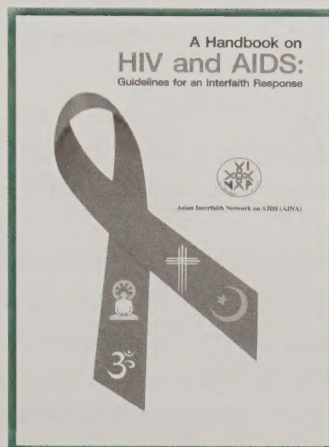
Interfaith Handbook on HIV and AIDS

The publication, *A Handbook on HIV and AIDS: Guidelines for an Interfaith Response*, was launched at Hotel Dhyana Pura Beach Resort on August 8, 2009. The handbook is a three-year project of the Asian Interfaith Network on AIDS (AINA). It is the result of efforts of interfaith communities responding to HIV and AIDS.

The first part of the handbook gives background to the interfaith response, faith values and motivation and interventions both by faith-based organizations and interfaith organizations like the Interfaith Network on AIDS in Thailand (INAT), Indonesian Interfaith Network on AIDS (INTERNA) and Indian Interfaith Coalition on AIDS (IICA) and the activities of AINA. The statements on "Response of Faith Communities to HIV and AIDS - Have we kept the promise?", Colombo, August 19, 2007 and "Reclaiming Rights of Children Affected and Living with HIV and AIDS in Asia", Chiang Mai, July 5, 2009 are included in the publication.

The second part provides statistics on HIV and AIDS, learning about HIV and AIDS and their challenges, addressing stigma and discrimination, human rights and HIV and AIDS, comprehensive community-based interventions, advocacy, networking and sharing of resources, capability building of human resources and program management, evaluation and monitoring.

The aim of the publication is to give information, education and communication skills on HIV and AIDS and raise



The resource book is available upon request at USD10 each. Email cca@cca.org.hk

awareness on issues of stigma and discrimination, human rights, prevention, treatment, care and support, counseling, advocacy, networking, capacity building, program management, evaluation and monitoring; enhance the spirit of love, compassion, mutual support and solidarity among people of different faiths that will lead to the cessation of suffering of the people living with HIV and AIDS, and give an authentic witness of collective and common endeavor; and facilitate learning experience through trainings geared towards a holistic response to the HIV and AIDS crisis, in accordance with faith beliefs, sacred scriptures and religious traditions.

2010 ASIA SUNDAY

MAY 16

Theme:

"Called to Prophecy,
Reconcile and Heal"

2009 Christmas Message

*For he is our peace;
in his flesh he has made both groups
into one and has broken down the dividing wall,
that is, the hostility between us.
(Ephesians 2:14, NRSV)*

As we are celebrate Christmas we look back and remember with humble gratitude God's many blessings to our lives. The CCA staff and officers warmly wish you a merry Christmas and a bountiful new year.

In the meantime, tensions and stresses in life continue in the day-to-day challenges of existence. Christmas comes to us at a time of much despair, hopelessness and fear. The Christmas story will be remembered in places of worship around the world. For a time, many will feel "the peace, joy and love that passes all understanding."

Nowadays, nearly 3,000 million people live on less than 2 US dollars. There are 20 million refugees, 95 million migrant workers, 15 million orphans, 39.5 million people living with HIV and AIDS, and 30,000 children die each day due to poverty. Millions die as a result of climate change and global warming. The persistence of poverty is the gravest human rights crisis of our time.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of peace, was born and lived among us - Emmanuel, calling us to examine our souls, to be just in our treatment of our fellow human beings, to resist passing judgment on others, and to put aside intolerance and prejudice in favor of becoming more loving and forgiving.

The charge of Christmas is to call us to prophesy, reconcile and heal our broken world - to bring the fullness of life especially to the poor, to protect basic human dignity and human rights of the people, and to create just and sustainable socio-economic and political structures. It is an expression of solidarity with life and action together with the people, the needy and the marginalized.

God created all and cares for every creation. The God we strive to follow is one who hears the cries of the suffering people and inspires us to work for the fullness of life for all.

One true meaning of Christmas is that Jesus Christ has come to us in the midst of the struggle for life to flourish more fully and for just peace to reign.

*Let our songs be as glad and spontaneous
as the songs of old that accompanied the news of his coming,
songs that give glory to God.*

*Let our telling of the Christmas message be clear: Rejoice!
This day, Christ Jesus, our Savior was born!*

Prawate Khid-arn
General Secretary

Momo of Burma. ©CCA